

## Despair and Hope--Chapter Three

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Summary: Rose makes the decision to leave New York and travel to Jack's hometown of Chippewa Falls. Disclaimer in the prologue.

The next thing Rose was aware of was the feeling of being completely immersed in water--but thankfully, not the frigid, freezing water of the infinitely deep Atlantic Ocean. This water was mercifully warm, enveloping her entire body and soul in its delicious heat. She had forgotten what it was like to be warm: complete heaven. For the first time in days, Rose allowed herself to enjoy something without the confines of guilt consuming her.

The second thing she was aware of was the sound of someone's insistent tapping. She frowned in annoyance, wondering who in the world would dare interrupt her in her moment of peace. "Rose darlin', are you all right in there? You've been in there for a while."

Rose opened her eyes, suddenly aware of her surroundings. She was in a rather large bath tub--nothing she was unused to--but she had no memory of how she had gotten there. The last thing she remembered was being with Jack. She smiled at the precious memory, peering down at her nude form in search of any evidence of her pregnancy. Of course there was no sign--Jack had only planted his seed about a week ago. \*Put your hands on me, Jack.\* She shuddered, despite her warmth.

"I'm fine, Molly," she called to her anxious savior, trying to control her ragged breathing at the memory of making love to Jack. "I'll be right out." Slowly, she stood up on wobbly legs, trying to control the wave of dizziness that rushed over her. She knew that she would not be able to confirm her pregnancy for several more weeks, but in her heart, she needed no confirmation. She could feel Jack's child growing inside of her--an actual part of Jack that would serve as inarguable proof of his existence and the love they had shared.

Her encounter with Jack had not been a dream, she mused as she towel dried her hair out thoroughly. She could smell the sweet scent of his skin. She could feel the heat radiating from his body that had pressed so close to hers, so hard and real. She could taste him on her lips and feel his warm breath against her skin. No, he had been too vivid; too tangible.

She sighed as she tied a robe around her body and picked up a hairbrush from the sink.

"I have the bed made out for you, dear," Molly told Rose as she emerged from the bathroom. "I'll be sleeping in the next room if you need anything."

Rose smiled at her, for the first time capable of showing that she was indeed aware of what was going on around her. "Thank you, Molly."

"Any time, darlin'. Could I get you something to eat or drink?"

Her stomach rumbled at the suggestion. She'd hardly eaten anything in days, and if she wanted her baby to be healthy, food was a necessity. "Yes, please," she replied graciously.

Minutes later, a bellboy had sent up a great deal of extravagant and delicious smelling food. After tipping him generously, Molly sent him on his way. Rose began devouring the meal with an energy and motivation she had not felt in days. She threw etiquette completely to the wind. Rose Dawson was not ruled by such insignificant trivialities.

"Gracious, child, you must have been starved. You certainly seem to be feeling better. It's good that you have an appetite."

Rose grinned at her. "If only my mother could see me."

They shared a laugh at the image of Ruth's reaction to such an obvious breach of etiquette. "Rose, do you intend to ever let your mother know you survived?" Molly finally asked her in all seriousness. "She has been quite worried about you, and she still has not given up on her hopes that she might find you. She does love you, Rose."

Rose considered it for a moment. "One day, perhaps, I might contact her. I still love her, after all her selfishness, but I can never be the person she wants me to be again. I am no longer Rose DeWitt Bukater, and I think that Mother would have a difficult time accepting who I truly am."

Molly studied the young woman thoughtfully. "And who are you truly, darlin'?"

Rose looked her straight in the eye, her expression now serious. "I am Rose Dawson, a woman no longer bound by the limits of society. I am free, and I intend on making it count."

Molly smiled at her. "Good for you," she said sincerely.

"Molly, I'm sure that by now you know how much I loved Jack--how much I love him still." She waited for Molly's reaction.

"I know you do, honey. I know."

"Well," she continued, "he came to me earlier tonight." She paused before continuing. "Molly, I just thought you should know that he told me that I am carrying his child."

Rose visibly cringed in her anticipation of Molly's reaction. It was, after all, considered quite indecent and unacceptable to be with child outside of wedlock. Society frowned sternly upon it. But Molly was not your average society woman, and the fact that she broke out in a huge grin proved that assessment to be correct.

"Rose, that's wonderful," she exclaimed, sincerely happy for the young woman as she threw her arms around Rose in a bear hug that also would have been considered a breach of etiquette. "But I have to ask you if you're sure it wasn't a dream."

"I'm sure," Rose answered with more conviction than she ever had in her young life. "Molly, as far as I'm concerned, Jack was my husband, and he will always be. We may not have had the time to go through with the actual ceremony, but in our hearts, we were married. Jack will now always be a part of me." Tears sprung from the corner of the girl's eyes--this time not from her sorrow, but from her joy.

Molly was moved by the young girl's unabashed declaration of love for the man who had saved her life. "I know he will, sweetheart. So tell me--what are you going to name him--or her?"

Rose laughed. "I haven't exactly had the time to think about it, actually. But Jack told me that it was a girl--"

"Jacklynn, then," Molly cut her off.

"Pardon me?" Rose asked in confusion.

"You should name that little girl Jacklynn, after her daddy."

Rose considered it, and then wondered why she even had to consider it. Of course her name would be Jacklynn. How could she give her child any other name? She owed Jack that honor--that his daughter would be named after him. Their daughter would be Jacklynn-Margaret Josephine Dawson. Maybe Jackie for short? She told Molly this.

"Now that's a name," Molly teased good-naturedly. "It's perfect," she assured the young woman when she feigned offense. Reaching out, she hugged the orphaned girl tightly. "Now you get yourself a good night's sleep, you here?"

Rose nodded obediently, too exhausted to protest as she stifled a yawn. After Rose changed into a nice, warm nightgown, Molly tucked her in and kissed her softly on her forehead as if she were a little girl who needed to be taken care of. In many ways, she was. "Goodnight, Mrs. Dawson."

Rose grinned through her increasingly heavy eyelids. "Goodnight, Mrs. Brown."

Molly turned to go.

"Molly?" Rose's voice called her back.

She stopped in her tracks. "What is it, darlin'?"

"Thank you," Rose said, despite her exhaustion. "Thank you for everything. I know that you have your own problems, and that I must be an added burden--"

"Nonsense," Molly cut her off sharply. "You're not a burden, Rose. You're a friend; a friend who needs help. Understand?"

Rose smiled, touched by this woman's magnanimous kindness. No wonder Jack had adopted her as a sort of substitute mother. Isn't that what she was doing now? "I understand," she answered solemnly.

"Good," Molly replied sternly. "Now that that's cleared up, I'm going to bed."

Rose smiled slightly as she watched the older woman leave. Almost contentedly, she pulled the warm blankets up under her chin. It was such precious bliss to be in a nice, warm bed. Never again would she take that particular luxury for granted. "Goodnight, Jack," she whispered under her breath as her eyes shut heavily. "I love you." And as the burden of reality drifted away with the blessing of a much needed rest, Rose distantly thought she could feel Jack's response in her heart. \*I love you, my Rose.\*

\* \* \* \*

It was cold . . . so very cold. She had almost lost all feeling in her body as she fought to grasp onto consciousness with her despondent and tired mind. Dimly, she thought she was going to die. Besides, wasn't her body shutting down? Wasn't that the cause of the numbness penetrating her useless limbs? The cries of the anguished came out of the very center of the ocean itself, enveloping her in its hopeless agony. Oh God, was that a baby crying? \*Please oh please make it stop, Jack.\*

But Jack was no longer talking. He hadn't made a sound in some time. He was just as useless to stop the horrible wails of the doomed as she was. \*The doomed.\* Her own thought echoed hollowly through her mind. \*We're doomed, aren't we Jack?\* The black depths of the sea would eventually swallow them all, as it had the "unsinkable" ship.

Her mind drifted like the wardrobe door she was laying on. She was not aware of the passage of time as all her senses had gone as numb as her heart. She could no longer even feel Jack's hand which

clutched tightly to hers, frozen there with a seal of the cold, welding them into one. Lazily, her eyes fluttered open. Far above, she could glimpse the blurry white lights of the stars in the cloudless night sky . . . a sky as deep and dark as the ocean upon which they floated. The stars were so beautiful, peering out like the finest of jewels in the black velvet sky, she thought fleetingly. She began to hum, low in her throat, taking her back to a recent memory--a memory as precious as life itself. She was flying, arms outstretched over the bow of the Titanic. Jack was there, singing to her softly, his arms holding hers out to the wind as he began lightly stroking her fingers with his own. He was so tender . . . so loving.

"Come Josephine in my flying machine . . . and it's up she goes; up she goes . . ."

Was that her own voice? Had she been singing out loud? "Come Josephine . . . in my flying . . ." She stopped as she gradually became aware of a light drifting over her face and body. Confused, she strained to turn her head slightly, searching for the source of the mysterious light. Rose could see a shape emerging from the blackness of the night sky, silhouetted by the dim light of the stars. It seemed so out of place. For a moment, she wondered if she were dreaming, or maybe hallucinating. \*The angel of death,\* her mind told her in a moment of delirium \*I've died and he's come to take me.\* She studied the shape through her hazed mind, dimly aware of the voice projecting from the curious object. "Is there anybody alive out there?" the voice seemed to say, sounding slow and surreal to her half frozen eardrums. "Can anyone hear me?" To Rose, the voice sounded distant; foreign.

Slowly, realization dawned on her. A boat. Their only chance at salvation. "Jack," she whispered, shaking his hand in an effort to gain his attention.

"Jack," she whispered again when her first attempt failed to wake him. She rolled around on her stomach to face his still form. His eyes were closed, fastened in his deep sleep. He looked so peaceful. "Jack," she whispered again, shaking him a bit more insistently. He had to wake up before the boat got too far away.

"HELLO! CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?"

She turned her eyes back to her lover. "Jack, there's a boat." She shook his arm, anxiousness now creeping into her voice. "Jack," she said insistently. She stopped suddenly, reality falling into place with a nauseating blow to her gut. She felt her heart sink with a feeling of dread forming in the pit of her stomach. No. This wasn't possible. He couldn't be . . .

"Jack," she whispered forcefully, shaking him almost violently. No. This was NOT happening. Not after all they'd been through together. "\*Jack\*" But look at him--his lips were blue. Ice had formed under his nostrils. \*He's not breathing!\*

\*SHUT UP!\*

"JACK!" she whispered, desperate for it not to be so; desperate for anything that could make the horrible truth to not be true.

"Jack!" She gasped his name this time, voice cracking with unspeakable emotions as hot tears stung her frozen cheeks. \*No.\* "There's a boat, Jack," she cried in desperation, hoping the good news would bring him back. "Oh, Jack." She was now crying outright, the gasps pouring from her tortured soul just as surely as the hot tears, unbearable to her cold skin. \*NoNoNoNoNoNo.\*

It was no use. The harsh reality struck her sickened heart. \*So the angel of death came for you and not me.\* The bitterness of the thought struck her like a blow to the face.

She glanced up. Through her tears, she could see the boat was threatening to banish into the darkness forever. It no longer mattered. She could not go on without Jack.

Resignedly, voice trembling with small gasps of sorrow, Rose turned away from the boat and her would-be saviors. Resting her head next to her beloved's, she closed her eyes. \*We can be together now, Jack.\*

\*You must promise me that you'll survive; that you'll go on . . . that you won't give up . . . no matter what happens; no matter how . . . hopeless. Promise me now, Rose, and never let go of that promise.\*

\*I promise.\*

\*Never let go.\*

\*I will never let go, Jack. I will never let go.\*

Her eyes suddenly snapped open. The promise. "Come back," she whispered with a renewed sense of purpose. Slowly, she willed herself to raise up. "Come back," she tried to call again to the retreating boat, but to her despair, her voice came out in a strangled choke. "Come back," she tried again, attempting with futile desperation to make her voice heard. "Come back." Sobs threatened to wrench from her trembling body. Her vocals seemed to be frozen. "Come back!" came her desperate gasp, willing her voice to break through its confinement. It was no use. "Come back, come back!"

She could see the boat retreating into the night, threatening to disappear just as suddenly as it had appeared. "HELLO! CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?"

"There's nothing there, sir," came the voice of another officer.

"Come back, come back," Rose gasped in a last effort, hope fading from her voice as it dulled in her eyes.

Just as suddenly as the hope faded, it reappeared as an idea formed in her mind. Hesitantly, she wrenched her hand free of Jack's. "I'll never let go," she told him solemnly, voice trembling with small gasps of despair as she kissed the backs of his hands tenderly, bidding him farewell. "I promise."

As fresh tears stained her cheeks, she released him. She watched on mournfully as he faded from view, eager to etch her last glimpse of him permanently into her mind as he vanished into the same endless

depths that the Titanic had been swallowed into. She watched the empty space that he had vanished into for several moments after he was gone, shoulders shaking with the gasps of pain erupting forth from her soul. He was gone--her life, her love, her reason for living was gone from this mortal coil forever, leaving her with another eighty-five years to wait to be reunited with him.

She glanced up at the boat, now almost completely out of view. She hadn't much time. Gaze lingering momentarily at Jack's watery grave, she rolled off the board. Now was no time to grieve.

The icy water hit her like needles, but she pushed the pain to the edge of her mind, intent on her purpose. She would live up to her promise, no matter what. She reached her target: the officer in the water who had earlier been blowing a whistle in an effort to bring the boats back. That same officer was now just as dead as Jack, his whistle sealed to his blue lips. Ignoring the monstrosity of the situation, Rose unceremoniously yanked it out of his frozen lips and applied it to hers, ignoring the pain as the cold metal pressed into the sensitive skin of her lips.

Taking a deep breath, she blew on it as hard as her tortured lungs would allow her. She blew on it persistently, finally gratified to hear the same booming voice from earlier yell, "COME ABOUT!"

She kept blowing as when the boat turned in her direction, and she did not stop until the beams of their search lights stared her in her pale face.

\* \* \*

Rose woke suddenly, disorientation clouding her dazed mind. She glanced frantically around the room in an effort to recall her whereabouts. Then it hit her--she was in Molly's hotel room in New York.

Although she could not recall in exact detail the dream of the night before, remnants of it still floated on the edge of her mind. An image of Jack suddenly came to her: the distance between them was widening. As he disappeared into the water, his lifeless arm almost seemed to be reaching for her, beckoning her. They were now separated--not just by the infinite deepness of the ocean, but by time itself.

She shuddered. \*Stop it, Rose,\* she told herself firmly. This was accomplishing nothing. Still, she could not find the motivation to rise out of bed, though she could tell by the patterns of the sunlight being cast through the window that it was probably past noon. "What happens now?" she asked aloud, breaking the disconcerting quiet of the empty room. She wasn't exactly sure how to go about keeping her promise to Jack. Where would she start? \*Ever been to Wisconsin? I grew up there near Chippewa Falls. Me and my father, we went ice fishing out on Lake Wissota . . .\* The memory of Jack's voice suddenly inspired her.

Rose smiled. "Chippewa Falls. Just as good a place to start as any," she whispered, rubbing her belly gently. \*We will see where your father grew up,\* she thought toward the newly created child in her womb; a child that she had yet to prove the existence of, but nevertheless knew it did exist. \*Maybe your father still has friends

there who can tell us more about him.\*

The thought seemed to content Rose for the moment as she fantasized about the possibilities of another door of Jack's life opening up for her.

There was suddenly a gentle tapping on the door to her room. "Rose darlin'?" Molly's voice filtered through the wood. "Are you up yet? I brought you some lunch."

"Come in, Molly," Rose called politely. The spirited presence of Molly Brown entered the room carrying a silver tray. Gently, she set it down on Rose's lap.

"Thank you, Molly," she smiled in appreciation.

"It's no problem, Rose. You just eat up." Rose dug in just as obediently as the night before. "How are you feeling?" she asked the young woman, searching her eyes for the truth.

Rose paused with fork midway up to her mouth to consider. "Sometimes I think I am going to be all right, but then I relapse. Like right now, I feel like I can go on. But I just know that some time during the day, it's going to hit me."

Rose studied the girl's thoughtful expression sympathetically. "Rose, I'm going back home to Denver tomorrow evening. I have to be there--my grandson has taken ill. That's the whole reason I was traveling home on the Titanic."

Rose nodded. "I understand."

"You should know that you're welcome to come with me, Rose. I have a big house with lots of room. You wouldn't be a burden. You could stay there until you get back on your feet."

Rose placed a warm hand on Molly's. "That's very considerate of you, Molly, and eventually I might even take you up on your offer--for a time. But there's something I have to do first. And don't worry about me--I have plenty of money to get by on until I can find some kind of work."

"Where are you going?" Molly asked, concern evident in her voice.

"Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. It's where Jack grew up. I have to see it."

Molly nodded. "I wish nothing but the best for you, sweetheart. I hope you find what you're looking for."

"Me, too, Molly. Me, too."

Continued in Chapter Four.

End  
file.